

Powerful Tips for Conquering Panic Attacks and Restoring Peace of Mind



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Panic attacks often come out of the blue and without an obvious cause. One moment you feel normal and the next you find it hard to breathe and your heart is pounding like a drum inside your chest. Irrational thoughts take control of you; you wonder whether you're having a heart attack or are on the verge of passing out. So anxious are you that you feel like you're out of your body.

What's going on? The jitters and feelings of being smothered and out of your body are your internal fight-or-flight response taking over. Panic attacks are overwhelming and leave you feeling helpless. But there are steps you can take to manage them.

Panic Attacks Can Lead to Secondary Fear and Avoidance

Anxiety and panic are appropriate in certain situations -- when you're being chased by a bear or someone is pointing a gun at you. Even non-life-threatening situations like starting a new job or going to a social function where you don't know anyone can cause a less intense form of anxiety. What makes panic attacks different is there's no obvious threat.

Panic attacks often progress to the point that you began to fear the fearful feelings themselves. You fear going outside or doing the things you enjoy because you're afraid an attack will overwhelm you

when you're in public. When you have a panic attack, you feel a complete loss of control and wonder whether you're losing your mind. You're not. The symptoms you feel are due to overstimulation of your nervous system, part of the fight-or-flight response.

Don't Let Panic Attacks Control Your Life

When you have panic attacks, the apprehension and concerns about "what if" can make you a prisoner to your own fears. People with panic attacks often develop secondary anxiety, such as fear of going out in public or fear of driving. Unchecked, this can lead to severe depression. Here are some simple steps you can take to loosen the grip that panic has over you:

Exercise

Aerobic exercise, especially jogging and running, stimulate the release of endorphins, natural feel-good chemicals that have a calming effect. Some studies show exercise compares favorably to cognitive therapy for easing panic attacks.

Meditation

A number of studies show mindfulness meditation helps to relieve psychological stress and anxiety. One study even showed people who took part in an eight-week mindfulness meditation course experienced changes in parts of their brain involved in learning, memory and emotions, confirmed by imaging studies. Instructional videos are available to help you learn the art and science of mindfulness meditation.

Breathing Exercises

Some research suggests people who suffer with panic attacks have breathing rates that are too fast. In fact, one of the most common symptoms is difficulty breathing. Oftentimes, during a panic attack, people take quick, shallow breaths that worsen the situation. Rapid breathing can cause changes to the pH of your blood and exacerbate symptoms. During a panic attack, you can often get relief by breathing into a paper bag. Another approach is to retrain your breathing patterns so that you're breathing more deeply from your abdomen rather than your chest. Instructional videos online can show you how to do this.

Be Sure You're Covering the Basics

Make sure you're getting at least seven hours of sleep nightly and eating a diet that contains as little sugar and processed carbohydrates as possible. Lack of sleep and eating a diet rich in sugar and refined carbs can trigger blood sugar fluctuations that make panic attacks worse. Needless to say, you should eliminate all caffeine from your diet.

Some drugs can worsen panic attacks as well, including decongestants, blood pressure medications, thyroid drugs, antidepressants, steroids, hormones and asthma medications. Ask your

doctor if you're taking medications that can make anxiety worse. Avoid alcohol too; it may temporarily relieve anxiety, but can worsen the problem in the long run.

Let Go

During a panic attack the worst thing you can do is try to fight it. Instead, accept the feelings and even encourage them. It sounds counterintuitive, but when you stop fighting the panic, it loses its hold on you. It takes practice to do this, but it can make all the difference in the long run.

Finally, don't be afraid to seek counseling if you can't deal with panic attacks on your own. A therapist can help you work through any issues that might be triggering your anxiety and panic. Remember, you're not alone. Panic attacks affect almost 2 percent of all Americans. Help is available should you need it.

References:

Science Nordic "Exercise helps curb panic disorder symptoms" October 2013.

Harvard [Health](#) Publications. "Mindfulness meditation may ease anxiety, mental stress"

"Teach your child powerful anxiety relief techniques at www.gozen.com"